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HISTORY

OF THE

FIRST CHURCH IN BOSTON,

1630—1880.

By ARTHUR B. ELLIS.

With a Preface,
By GEORGE E. ELLIS.



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BOSTON, November 10, 1880.

It is proposed to publish a History of the First Church of Boston, from its formation to the present time, including an account of the building of the house of worship now occupied by it, and of the proceedings in commemoration of its 250th Anniversary.

The work has been prepared by Arthur B. Ellis, Esq., and will have an Introduction by George E. Ellis.

The volume will be of between four and five hundred pages, in the style of this, its first chapter.

Its price will be between three and five dollars a copy, depending upon the number of copies subscribed for.

Early subscriptions are solicited.

MESSRS. HALL & WHITING,
PUBLISHERS.

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“And if any tax me for wasting paper with recording these small matters, such may consider that little mothers bring forth little children, small commonwealths matters of small moment, the reading whereof yet is not to be despised by the judicious; because small things, in the beginning of natural or politic bodies, are as remarkable as greater in bodies full-grown.”

Gov. DUDLEY'S *Letter to the Countess of Lincoln.*

HISTORY

OF THE

FIRST CHURCH IN BOSTON.

CHAPTER I.

1630-1632.

JOHN WILSON.

ORIGIN AND FOUNDATION OF FIRST CHURCH IN BOSTON. — WORSHIP, DISCIPLINE, AND GOVERNMENT.

THE history of First Church in Boston begins with the occupation of Charlestown by the English colonists under Winthrop. It was there that the founders of our church signed the covenant and became a body of worshippers. The *Arbella*, the vessel in which they crossed the ocean, put into Salem harbor the 12th day of June, 1630, and "went to Mattachusetts" the 17th of the month. After exploring the latter neighborhood, she returned to Salem the next day but one, and, joined by the rest of the fleet, again set sail, and came to anchor in Charlton harbor, as Winthrop calls it, early in July. They found that other Englishmen had visited the spot before them. The Sprague brothers, Ralph, Richard, and William, together with others, had made their way to the place, through

the woods, from Salem, two years before, in the summer of 1628. At that time the town records describe it as "a neck of land, generally full of stately timber, and the country round about an uncouth wilderness." But the Spragues found that they too had been preceded by one Thomas Walford, a smith, who with his family was the first white settler in the place. In the year previous to Winthrop's arrival, in June, 1629, one Thomas Graves, an experienced engineer, came from Salem, and built a house called the Great House. This was a two-storied wooden block structure, the lower part used for storage purposes, and the upper story for civil, and if the weather was so unpleasant as to prevent worship out of doors, for religious, meetings.

Our pioneers came poorly prepared to contend with the hardships of their new situation. They had brought over small provision with them, trusting to a report that they would find plenty on their arrival in the new country; and what they had was badly damaged by the voyage. Their means of shelter were poor, and the long confinement on shipboard had made many of them diseased. "And although the people were loving and pitiful," says the old record, "yet the sickness did so prevail, that the whole were not able to tend the sick as they should be tended, upon which many perished and died and were buried about the Town Hill." To meet the scarcity of provisions, the Governor despatched

Captain Pearce to the coast of Ireland in quest of a fresh supply. It must have been that that country was thought to be nearer than any other, otherwise there would seem to be some reason for thinking with Cotton Mather, that perhaps there were other places more overflowing with milk and honey, to which it would have been wiser to send. However as afterwards appears, the errand proved fruitful of success.

In spite of these adversities—we might rather say because of them—the people hurried on the organization of the church. The 30th of July was set apart as a day of fasting and prayer, and after appropriate religious exercises, Governor Winthrop, Deputy-Governor Dudley, Mr. Isaac Johnson, and Mr. John Wilson subscribed the following church covenant, the same which is continued with us to-day:—

“In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, & in Obedience to His holy will & Divine Ordinaunce.

“Wee whose names are herevnder written, being by His most wise, & good Providence brought together into this part of America in the Bay of Massachusetts, & desirous to vnite our selves into one Congregation, or Church, vnder the Lord Jesus Christ our Head, in such sort as becometh all those whom He hath Redeemed, & Sanctified to Himselfe, do hereby solemnly, & religiously (as in His most holy Proesence) Promise, & bind o’selves, to walke in all our wayes according to the Rule of the Gospell, & in all sincere Conformity to His holy Ordinaunces, & in mutuall love, & respect each to other, so neere as God shall give vs grace.”

Of the first four signers of this covenant it is unnecessary to say much. Their history is bound up with that of the Commonwealth. John Winthrop, the first Governor, and the first who signed the church covenant, was of good family and possessed of what was then regarded as a large estate, amounting to six or seven hundred pounds a year. He was bred a lawyer, and was some forty-three years of age when he came from England. Thomas Dudley was first Deputy-Governor, and afterwards for four years Governor of the colony. He was bred a soldier, and served under Queen Elizabeth in the wars with France. He was fifty-three years of age when he came to this country. Isaac Johnson was a gentleman by birth and of fortune, and had married a daughter of the Earl of Lincoln. The sad death of the Lady Arbella, followed shortly after by that of her grief-stricken husband,¹ was the first shadow which spread a gloom over the colony.

The Rev. John Wilson, the first pastor of the church, was born and bred in clerical atmosphere, and, had it not been for his non-conformity, would doubtless have held some high position in the Church of England, as did his immediate ancestors. But, like other strong and scrupulous characters of the period, he preferred a life in the wilderness to the enjoyment of clerical preferment at the sacrifice

¹ September 30, 1630, about one month after his wife. "He was a holy man, and wise; and died in sweet peace, leaving some part of his substance to the colony." — WINTHROP'S *Journal*.

of his religious convictions. He shares the epithet, affixed by Cotton Mather to the first four ministers of our church, of "Johannes in eremo." Of his immediate ancestors, his grandfather, "William Wilson late of Wellsbourne in the co. of Lincoln, Gentleman, departed this life within the Castle of Windsor in the yeare of our Lord 1587 the 27 Day of August and lyeth buried in this place." (Tombstone in the chapel of Windsor Castle.) Wellsbourne is not far from Lincoln and Boston, and this fact indicates some special tie among the early settlers who came from Lincolnshire.

His father, William Wilson, D.D., of Merton College, Oxford, Prebendary of Rochester, Rector of Cliffe, Chancellor of St. Paul's, and Canon of his King's Majesty's free chapel of St. George, within his castle of Windsor, where he lies buried, died May 15, 1615, aged seventy-three years.

John Wilson,¹ our minister, was born at Windsor in 1588. His mother was Isabel Woodhal, niece of Edmund Grindal, the celebrated Puritan Archbishop of Canterbury. He was educated at Eton and King's College, Cambridge, and married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir John Mansfield. He was the fourth signer of the covenant, pastor of the church for thirty-seven years, and died the 7th day of August, 1667, aged seventy-eight years.

¹ His life is described in a later chapter. This little sketch of his family and antecedents was partly furnished by Mr. Thomas Minns, a descendant of Wilson.

Dr. Edmund Wilson, brother of Rev. John Wilson, died in England soon after the arrival in this country, leaving £1000 to the infant colony.¹

Mrs. Wilson, the pastor's wife, died June 6, 1660.

"On the 1st of August, Increase Nowell and four others united with the church and signed the covenant, and soon the number amounted to sixty-four men and half as many women."

From the very start religion was uppermost in the minds of the colonists. Religion planted the colony. When the first General Court was held on the 23d of August, before any measures had been taken to provide for support or shelter, the first topic of discussion was, "How shall the ministers be maintained?" And it was ordered that houses be built for them with convenient speed at the public charge, and salaries provided at £30 for Mr. Phillips of Watertown, and £20 for Mr. Wilson of Boston till his wife come over. Sir Richard Saltonstall undertook to see the former part of this order carried out for Mr. Phillips, and the Governor for Mr. Wilson.

"On the 27th of August another fast was observed, and the church duly organized by the appointment of the proper officers." The list of regularly appointed church officers at this date included pastors, teachers, ruling elders, deacons, and sometimes

¹ Mr. Wilson made a second and last voyage to England in 1634, partly to secure this legacy; and returned in 1635, this time with his wife and family. His first voyage in 1631 was unsuccessful in the special object sought for. See *infra*, 9.

deaconesses or widows. The functions of the widows, as laid down by a quaint writer, were "to show mercie with chearfulnesse and to minister to the sick and poore brethren." In another place the writer adds, "No church there [meaning Boston] hath a widow as far as I know;" an observation which we must be careful not to construe too literally. The distinction between pastor and teacher is somewhat nice.¹ The same writer says: "It is the duty of the pastor to exhort and besides to rule; the teacher to instruct in knowledge and likewise to rule." The elders were the Levites, or governing officers of the church, and the deacons performed the same duties as they do to-day, viz. received the contributions and accounted for the same.

The following were duly qualified: John Wilson as teacher; Increase Nowell, ruling elder; William Gager and William Aspinwall, deacons. Gager died September 20, 1630, a few days after his appointment. In the case of Mr. Wilson it was expressly understood that the ceremony should have no effect on his previous ordination by the bishop in England.

¹ Palfrey, in his chapter on "Primitive Institutions and Customs of New England," says: "A church fully furnished had a pastor and a teacher whose duty it was to preach and administer the ordinances, the distinctive function of the former being private and public exhortation, of the latter doctrinal and scriptural explanation." The reading of the Bible, or dumb reading, as it was called, was not generally approved, but thought to be too much in conformity with the Church of England practice, hence one of the functions of the teacher, viz. scriptural explanation or expounding, as it was called. — *History of New England*, ed. 1860, Vol. II. 37, 42. See also "History of Second Church in Boston," note to 22.

We now find the church fairly organized, the minister provided for, and nothing wanting but a place of worship. "The first meeting-place of the congregation was in the umbrage of a large tree."

In the month of August many of the colonists removed across the river to Boston; and soon a majority of the inhabitants of Charlestown, including the Governor, had made the change. "The principal cause which led to this removal was the want of running springs of water. The notion prevailed that no water was good for a town but running springs; and they were at that time acquainted with but one spring in Charlestown," which was on the margin of the river, in the sand, and when the tide was high could not be come at, and at other times was very brackish. Mr. William Blaxton, the first white inhabitant of Boston, first called the attention of the Governor to the existence of a pure spring of water on his side of the river. This information, combined with the increasing sickness, induced the Governor to make the change. From this period up to the time of separation, the people of Charlestown were obliged to cross the river to attend meetings, — an operation, in the winter time at least, involving much hazard. Provisions had now become very scarce, and had it not been for the timely arrival of Captain Pearce with an abundant supply, they would have had hard work to keep alive.

"The people were compelled to live upon clams and muscles, ground nuts and acorns, and these were obtained with much difficulty in the winter time, and upon these accounts they became much tired and discouraged, especially when they heard that the Governor had his last batch of bread in the oven. And many were the fears of the people that Mr. Pearce, who was sent to Ireland to fetch provisions, was cast away or taken by pirates; but God, who delights to appear in greatest straits, did work marvellously at this time, for before the very day appointed to seek the Lord by fasting and prayer, about the month of February or March, in comes Mr. Pearce, laden with provisions; upon which occasion the day of fast was changed and ordered to be kept as a day of thanksgiving."

This was on the 22d of February (O.S.).¹ The provisions were distributed among the people in proportion to their necessities. To show what a good face they kept under all their trials, we are told of a man, "inviting his Friends to a dish of Clams, at the Table gave thanks to Heaven, who had given them to suck the abundance of the Seas, and of the Treasures hid in the Sands."

In March, 1631, Mr. Wilson went to England to bring his wife. Before embarking, "Mr. Codrington [afterwards for many years Governor of Rhode Island] and Mr. Wilson, and divers of the congregation, met at the Governor's, and there Mr. Wilson, praying and exhorting the congregation to

¹ In quoting from old records no attempt has been made to alter the date from Old to New Style. The simple process of adjustment is this: "To change from Old to New, add ten days to any date from 1600 to 1700, and eleven days to a date from 1700 to September 14, 1752."

love, etc., commended to them the exercise of prophecy in his absence, and designed those whom he thought most fit to it, viz. the Governor, Mr. Dudley, and Mr. Nowell the elder. Then he desired the Governor to commend himself and the rest to God by prayer; which being done, they accompanied him to the boat; and so they went over to Charlestown, to go by land to the ship. This ship set sail from Salem April 1, and arrived at London (all safe), April 29." The apostle Eliot filled the vacancy caused by the absence of Mr. Wilson. The famous Roger Williams lays claim to the first invitation to fill this post. The statement, however, rests on his own assertion, and we find no corroboration of it on the church records or elsewhere. The reason he gives for declining the honor is perhaps worth noticing, as coming from a man so noted for his liberality in religion; he says it was because they (members of First Church) would not humble themselves for having held communion with the Church of England.

Mr. Wilson took with him to England a letter from Deputy-Governor Dudley to the Countess of Lincoln,—one of the most authentic documents touching upon this early period.¹ The date of it is March 12, 1630. It contains a very minute account of the condition of the colony. It begins:—

“For the satisfaction of your Honor and some friends, and for the use of such as shall hereafter intend to increase

¹ Young's *Chronicles of Massachusetts*, 304.

our Plantation in New-England, I have, in the throng of domestic, and not altogether free from public, business, thought fit to commit to memory our present condition, and what hath befallen us since our arrival here; which I will do shortly, after my usual manner, and must do rudely, having yet no table, nor other room to write in than by the fireside, upon my knee, in this sharp winter; to which my family must have leave to resort, though they break good manners and make me many times forget what I would say, and say what I would not."

He then proceeds to give an account of the hardships they endure:—

"The ships being gone, victuals wasting, and mortality increasing, we held divers fasts in our several congregations. But the Lord would not yet be deprecated; for about the beginning of September died Mr. Gager, a right godly man, a skilful chirurgeon, and one of the deacons of our congregation, Mr. Johnson, one of the five undertakers (the Lady Arbella, his wife, being dead a month before). This gentleman was a prime man amongst us, having the best estate of any, zealous for religion, and the greatest furtherer of this plantation."

And then, towards the close, he says:—

"But now, having some leisure to discourse of the motives for other men's coming to this place, or their abstaining from it, after my brief manner, I say this, that if any come hither to plant for worldly ends, that can live well at home, he commits an error, of which he will soon repent him; but if for spiritual, and that no particular obstacles hinder his removal, he may find here what may well content him, viz. materials to build, fuel to burn, ground to plant, seas and rivers to fish in, a pure air to breathe in, good water to drink, till wine or beer can be made, which,

together with the cows, hogs, and goats brought hither already, may suffice for food; for as for fowl and venison, they are dainties here as well as in England. For clothes and bedding they must bring them with them, till time and industry produce them here. In a word, we yet enjoy little to be envied, but endure much to be pitied, in the sickness and mortality of our people. . . . If any godly men, out of religious ends, will come over to help us in the good work we are about, I think they cannot dispose of themselves nor of their estates more to God's glory and the furtherance of their own reckoning. But they must not be of the poorer sort yet, for divers years; for we have found by experience that they have hindered, not furthered the work. And for profane and debauched persons, their oversight in coming hither is wondered at, where they shall find nothing to content them. If there be any endued with grace, and furnished with means to feed themselves and theirs for eighteen months, and to build and plant, let them come over into our Macedonia and help us, and not spend themselves and their estates in a less profitable employment. For others, I conceive, they are not yet fitted for this business."¹

Soon after Mr. Wilson's return from England, which took place on the 26th of May, some time in

¹ "1631, July 21. The governor, deputy-governor, and Mr. Nowell, the elder of the congregation at Boston, go to Watertown, to confer with Mr. Phillips the pastor and Mr. Brown the elder of the congregation there about an opinion they had published, that the churches of Rome were true churches; the matter is debated before many of both congregations, and by the approbation of all the assembly, except three, is concluded an error."—PRINCE'S *Annals of New England*, 358.

"1632, July 3. The congregation (i. e. the church) at Boston, wrote to the elders and brethren of the churches of Plymouth, Salem, etc., for their advice in three questions: First, whether one person might be a civil magistrate and a ruling elder at the same time? Second, if not, then which should he lay down? Third, whether there might be divers pastors in the same church? The first was agreed by all negatively, the second and third doubtful."—*Ibid.* 398.

the month of August, 1632, the congregation of Boston and Charlestown began to build the first meeting-house. The situation chosen was on the south side of State Street, in Boston, where Brazer's Building now stands.¹ The walls were of stone, plastered with clay, and the roof thatched. This building, together with a parsonage² erected at the same time on what was formerly known as Wilson's Lane, in the immediate neighborhood of the church, was provided for by contributions amounting in all to £120. The winter, which was now setting in, proved so severe that passage over the river was often impracticable. This, no doubt, hastened the inevitable separation. The church in Charlestown became a distinct body on the 2d of November, 1632, withdrawing from the parent church about one fourth of the congregation. "Those of the church who stayed behind still retained their relation to the [old church] until October, 1632; when those members desiring a dismissal from the congregation, to enter into a new church-body at Charlestown, and having first sought solemnly unto God, with the rest of the church, for direction herein, they were accordingly dismissed upon the 14th day of the said month."³

¹ "A plan of the church lot as existing at this time, but as made out by Francis Jackson of late years, is in the library of the New England Historical and Genealogical Society. See the Register, April, 1860, 152."—*Memorial History of Boston* (1880), Vol. I. 119, note.

² "Wilson lived where the Merchants' Bank now stands."—*Memorial History of Boston* (1880), Vol. I. 119, note.

³ "1632, November 2 (Friday). Mr. Increase Nowell, Mr. Thomas James, and other Church members at Charlestown, who had been dismissed from the

“And now upon this separation,” says Foxcroft, in his centennial sermon in 1730, “I find the number of males in the church of Boston (after nigh two years’ continuance here, in which time, doubtless, additions were made to it) amounted but to about seventy or eighty, the body of the inhabitants.” Endeavors were at this time made to obtain the apostle Eliot for teacher, and there is very good reason to suppose that he would have accepted, had he not felt bound by an agreement made on the passage over from England to settle in Roxbury.¹

The 22d of November was solemnized as a fast, on which Mr. Wilson, hitherto the teacher, was ordained the pastor of the church. At the same time Mr. Oliver was chosen ruling elder, and two deacons were elected; on all of whom hands were imposed as a token of designation.

We have now witnessed the transplanting of the church from Charlestown to Boston, — the little seed out of which grew up such an abundant harvest. We find the congregation somewhat diminished, it is true, but from no internal causes. That harmony of thought and purpose of which Foxcroft speaks so

church at Boston, now embody into a (new) distinct Congregational Church, enter into covenant; and (the said) Mr. James is elected and ordained their pastor.” — PRINCE’S *Annals of New England*, 407.

¹ “Mr. John Eliot, a member of Boston congregation, and one whom the congregation intended presently to call to the office of teacher, was called to be a teacher to the church at Roxbury; and though Boston laboured all they could, both with the congregation of Roxbury, and with Mr. Eliot himself, alleging their want of him, and the covenant between them, &c., yet he could not be diverted from accepting the call of Roxbury, November 5. So he was dismissed.” — WINTHROP’S *Journal*, Vol. I. 93.

glowingly in 1730 was to remain unbroken for nearly two centuries. It was not till after the dawn of the nineteenth century that the ties were to be broken.

Our congregation, small as it was, constituted the bulk of the population of Boston. The influence which it had on the government of the colony may well be imagined when we consider that no one was a freeman until he became a member of a church;¹ that the minister was always consulted by the Governor in any important emergency, and very often his decision settled the matter entirely.

The growth of our church, from the foundation down to the present time, and the various changes which have taken place in the sentiments of the worshippers, during a period of two centuries and a half, open up another field of inquiry more properly included in a later period of our church history. All that concerns us in this connection is simply to hint at the origin and foundation of this church.

Who that reflects for one moment on the manner of this planting will feel the least surprised at the result? But will he not have reason to be proud of that result? Built on a sure foundation, the ark of the Lord has continued during the space of two centuries and a half. The same covenant, the same

¹ "We must be careful to bear in mind, however, that when this provision was passed, viz. in May, 1631, Massachusetts was a little community of traders, having no semblance to a state," so that the hardship of the deprivation did not count for much till the latter condition was realized. — DEXTER'S *Congregationalism of the last Three Hundred Years, etc.*, 420 et seq.

principles of purity and liberty which our fathers established, have come down to us from generation to generation, shedding their blessings not only on our own body of worshippers, but on the whole community. Well may such an influence be called one of the "distinguishing glories of New England."

And now, before we close this sketch, let us take a glance at the mode of church worship and government peculiar to the Puritans. The order of worship was common to all the churches, with perhaps some slight variations. That of Boston Church is thus described. "Every Sabbath or Lord's day, they come together at Boston by wringing of a bell,¹ about nine of the clock or before. The Pastor begins with solemn prayer continuing about a quarter of an hour. The Teacher then readeth and expoundeth a chapter; then a Psalme is sung, which ever one of the ruling Elders dictates. After that the Pastor preacheth a sermon, and sometimes extempore exhorts. Then the Teacher concludes with prayer and a blessing." Once a month they observed the Lord's Supper, of which notice was given a fortnight in advance. The ministers and ruling elders sat at the table, the rest in their seats or upon forms. The afternoon service began at two o'clock. The pastor

¹ At first by beat of the drum. For an account of the various ways (at first of necessity) resorted to for summoning people to the meeting, e. g. by blowing a shell or horn, and raising a flag,—methods resorted to as late as the middle of the last century,—see an interesting note to Dexter's Congregationalism, 452.

began as before noon; a psalm was sung, and the teacher preached his sermon. After and before the sermon was a prayer. Then followed baptism, if there was any. After this ceremony a contribution was taken up; one of the deacons saying, "Brethren of the congregation, now there is time left for contribution, wherefore as God hath prospered you, so freely offer." The magistrates and chief gentlemen then passed up, followed by the elders, and after them the rest of the congregation, one by one, all the men and all single persons, widows, and women in absence of their husbands, and deposited their offerings in a wooden box in charge of the deacon, if money or papers promising money; if anything more bulky, then to one side; ¹ and, after doing this, passed another way back to their seats.² Then followed admission of members and hearing of complaints. If not too late, they sang a psalm, and then the pastor closed with a prayer and blessing. "Upon the week dayes, there are Lectures in divers townes, and in Boston, upon Thursdayes, when Master Cotton teacheth out of the Revelation."³

As for the form of church government, "Every church hath power of government in, and by itselffe, and no church, or Officers, have power over one an-

¹ "I have seen a faire gilt cup with a cover, offered there by one, which is still used at the Communion."—LECHFORD'S *Plain Dealing*, 15. This cup may still be among the valuable collection of church silver, and, if so, would rival in antiquity the famous Winthrop cup.

² Until 1710, and even later, careful attention was given to the seating of people in meeting, with reference to social or civil dignity.

³ Winthrop's Journal gives the earliest notice of this lecture.

other but by way of advice or counsaile, voluntarily given or besought, saving that the General Court, now and then, over-rule some church matters ; and of late, divers of the Ministerie have had set meetings to order church matters ; whereby it is conceived they tend towards Presbyterian rule.”¹

The governing body of officers has already been alluded to, together with their proper functions. The church endeavored to rule as much as possible by unanimous consent. But where they could not agree, as, for example, on the admission or censure of a member, the matter was referred to a select council to hear and pass upon privately, or in presence of such of the brethren as saw fit to attend. The rules of admission and expulsion were very strict, as instance the following, from the church records :—

“The 17th of y^e 5th Moneth (1636). Thomas Matson formerly received by Comunion of churches, but now as a member vpon y^e confession of his fayth & repentance & pfessed subjection to y^e Lord Jesus Christ according to y^e Covenant of the Gospell, was admitted.

“The 24th of y^e same 5th Moneth Robert Parker o^r brother whoe was Exco^municate y^e 6^t of y^e 10th Moneth (1635) for scandalous oppression of his wives children in selling away

¹ The first synod, or council of ministers and others, was held at Cambridge (then Newtown), the 30th of August, 1637, and just escaped dealing with the famous Hutchinsonian controversy, which came up before the General Court two months later. John Cotton, the “patriarch of New England,” at that time teacher of the church, attended with John Wilson, pastor, as messengers to the council. John Davenport, then of New Haven, afterwards of Boston Church, was also one of the twenty-five ministers summoned. See chap. ii.

their inheritance from y^m & other hard vsage both of her & y^r was this day vpon pfession of his repentance received againe to y^e fellowship of ye Church."

"The 29th day of y^e 2^d Moneth 1638. Anne Walker y^e wife of one Richard Walker & sometime y^e wife & widdowe of o^r Brother Robert Houlton having before this day beene often privately Admonished of sundry *Scandalls*, as of Drunkenish, Intemperate, & vncleane or wantonish behaviors, & likewise of Cruelty towards her children & also of manifold lyes & still to this day psisting impenitently therein, was therefore now wth Joynt Consent of y^e Congregation Cast out of y^e Church."

"The 13th of y^e 11th Moneth (1638). Our brother Richard Wayte having purloyned out of buckskyn lether brought vnto him, soe much thereof as would make 3. mens gloves to y^e Scandall of sundry wthout, as well as of his brethren, & also having beene by some of y^e brethren dealt wth all for it, did often deny & forswear y^e same, wthout harkening to their Convincings according to y^e Rule, or to y^e Church to w^{ch} it was brought, was therefore this day, wth Joynt Consent of y^e Congregation Cast out of y^e Church.

"The 26th day of y^e same 9th Moneth (1639) being a day of *Publique fast* for our Congregation, our brother Mr Robert Keayne was Admonisht by o^r Pasto^r in y^e Name of y^e Church for selling his wares at excessive Rates, to y^e Dishono^r of Gods Name, y^e Offence of y^e Generall Co^rt, & y^e Publique Scandall of y^e Cuntry."

"The 8th Day of y^e s^d 1st Moneth 1640. Also, o^r Sistar Temperance Sweete y^e wife of one John Sweete was by o^r Pasto^r (in y^e Name of y^e Lord & wth y^e Consent of y^e Church (taken by their silence) Admonisht for having received into house & given entertainm^t vnto disorderly Company & ministring vnto y^m wine & strong waters even vnto Drunkenesse & y^t not wthout some iniquity both in y^e measure & pryce thereof."¹

¹ Church Records, 8 *et seq.*

Another instance is that of a gentlewoman who was excommunicated for saying: "A brother and others she feared, did conspire to arbitrate the price of Joyners work of a chamber too high, and endeavoring to bring the same into Civill Cognizance, not proceeding to take two or three to convince the party, and so to tell the Church, (though the first told the party of it) and this without her husband."

Still another instance is that of a good woman who was severely dealt with because she absented herself from meeting more than was thought proper. Her reason for doing so was, in brief, because she did not like the kind of preaching she heard. It mattered not which of the two powers, civil or ecclesiastical, first got jurisdiction. They both proceeded to try the cause, *pari* or *non pari passu*. The views of church government and order, at first indeterminate, were, by the powerful influence of John Cotton and others, embodied in a platform or religious constitution, called the Cambridge Platform, afterwards tacitly adopted as authority in all questions relating to church government. The power of the church made itself felt in those days against all who refused to conform to the established church tenets.

Any such offender was first admonished, and then, if he did not obey, was excommunicated, and thereafter had no more rights than an Indian. It is curious to note how even the great John Cotton, leader of the church and expounder of religion, barely

escaped censure for the sympathy which he was supposed to have secretly entertained for the views of the famous Anne Hutchinson. If we seek for the causes of this antagonism, they will be found in the temper of the age. The disorder, of which Puritan intolerance was the exponent in New England, was prevalent all over Christendom. All the religious world was busy trying to separate the chaff from the wheat. In New England, baptized in freedom of religion, they had not yet wrought out the problem how to unite toleration with a vigorous defence of the truth. It was still the age of witchcraft as well as of reformation. As long as the spirit of the former was abroad in the land, so long must the intolerance of the latter remain.

And yet, even in New England, allowance must be made for the peculiar kind of experiment that was set on foot. No scheme of the kind had ever before been attempted. "By charter from the English crown, the land was theirs as against all other civilized people, and they had a right to choose according to their own rules the associates who should help them to occupy and govern it. Exercising this right, they determined that magistracy and citizenship should belong only to Christian men, ascertained to be such by the best test which they knew how to apply."¹ All who could not come up to their standard were excluded, and if any persisted in staying where they were not wanted, more effect-

¹ Dexter's Congregationalism, 420, note.

ive measures were tried. From this point of view the charge of intolerance perhaps could hardly be made out.

As we look back on that early church in the wilderness, with its noble company of worshippers, we strive in vain to recall a like picture. The severe aspect of the structure called a meeting-house,¹ rudely fashioned from clay and stone, and thatched from the weather, must have been in marked contrast with what its occupants had been accustomed to at home, and in only too sad keeping with the stern lot they had encountered from the moment of setting foot on this virgin soil.

And that goodly company of men and women gathered within its sacred walls! Winthrop, Dudley, Humphrey, Vane, Endicott, are but a few of those most readily called to mind, whose presence filled this little sanctuary, and whose delight it was to sit and listen to John Cotton as he unfolded the Scriptures for their guidance and action.

We, whose happy lot it is to enjoy the fruits of their hard labors, can form but a faint conception of the struggle it must have cost even these sturdy zealots, to abandon their old home with its precious memories and associations, all that they held most dear, and with a wilderness around them, set themselves about a task full of nothing but anxieties and uncertainties. We lose sight of the great responsi-

¹ "Our fathers, from conscience, called their houses for worship 'meeting-houses.'" — DEXTER'S *Congregationalism*, 454.

bility they thereby incurred. Leaders in a vast enterprise, with no rule of action to guide them, and a wilderness to tame before them. We call them over-zealous, over-firm, narrow, and bigoted. This is the repelling side of their nature. Take a different view, and we shall find that these Puritan fathers were good and faithful men, "blameless and exemplary in character and life," and founders of a godly commonwealth. "The household purity, the domestic fidelity, the family discipline, the industry, thrift, and steadily increasing prosperity," of the Bay Colony, are all the fruits of their influence.

While we may be tempted to find fault with their *ways and methods*, let us not keep out of sight their true and noble natures.

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